



HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

MARCH 29, 2023

SENATE BILL 350

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT - CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM – ALTERATIONS

**TESTIMONY OF AVI LENCZ
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, AGUDATH ISRAEL OF MARYLAND**

SUPPORT

Agudath Israel of Maryland speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland, including some twenty community child care facilities and their children, and the thousands of preschool-age children and their families within our community.

The Child Care Scholarship Program provides much-needed support for Maryland's children, their parents, and their child care providers, and is a crucial investment in early childhood education and in securing Maryland's future. For families who struggle with low income and economic distress, the Child Care Scholarship Program is a lifesaver. For many families, the ability to rely on affordable trustworthy and responsible childcare providers to supervise their children during the day means the difference between being forced to stay at home versus being able to take on a job and bring in much-needed income and gaining that much more economic security. Without the program, the parent would be forced either to lose a source of income, or entrust their child to sub-par care arrangements. Conversely, many providers are only able to remain open because the program allows struggling parents, who would not otherwise be able to afford it, to enroll their children in the child care facility, thus broadening the consumer base and allowing the providers to remain solvent.

This bill would ensure that the funding provided to the Child Care Scholarship Program would be of a measure sufficient to allow all eligible families to participate. It would also codify enhancements in areas such as parental copayments and family eligibility that currently exist but are at risk of expiration.

Access to affordable child care is a child safety issue, an economic equity issue, and an educational issue. We thank the members of the committee for their work in optimizing the Child Care Scholarship Program, and respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 350.